

Falls and the Effects of the Environment



Both indoor and outdoor environments can impact on moving around safely. A fall can affect a person's physical well-being and impact on psychological and social well-being too. The fear of falling can result in avoiding activity, leading to social isolation and increasing frailty. Being in unfamiliar surroundings whether indoors or outdoors can also impact on having the confidence and the ability to move around safely.

Internal Hazards: may include

- Items left on the floor
- Position of furniture and cluttered pathways
- Loose carpets or rugs and any steps
- Worn carpets/frayed edges
- Heights of beds, chairs, toilets (high or low)
- Poor lighting (too dim or too bright)
- Placement of equipment and any trailing leads
- Furniture adaptations (such as chair raisers)
- Items not being within easy reach
- Hazards such as spillages or active pets
- Abandoned walking aids/equipment

External Hazards: may include

- Discarded items around the garden
- Gardening tools
- Uneven surfaces (grass, stone or gravel)
- Fallen/wet leaves
- Steps and variable levels
- Garden furniture, especially moveable
- Garden fixtures (plant pots or raised beds)
- Weather conditions (wet, icy, windy)
- Getting in & out of a minibus/car
- Unfamiliar locations/walkways on trips out
- Intoxication through alcohol

Footwear and Foot Health

Good foot health and properly fitting footwear can also play a vital part in reducing falls. Ensuring good foot health and suitable footwear will support stability and the following should be considered:

- Ensure toenails are trimmed regularly (by a suitably trained person i.e. chiropodist) and keep feet clean and dry especially in between the toes
- Check for cuts, blisters and sore areas; applying moisturiser to dry skin
- File dry or hard skin using a file or pumice stone

➤ Make sure footwear is suitable (for either indoors or outdoors), well-fitting and not loose, comfortable and securely fastened (especially slippers)

➤ It is recommended that podiatrists or chiropodists should be regularly consulted to support foot health and function for residents



**Sensible outdoor
footwear**



Not so sensible!!

Think about how suitable footwear is for the environment/weather.

- Is it safe to go outdoors? Is it icy/wet/windy?
- Is the resident's footwear adequate for walking outdoors?

Even consider this in the summer....do sandals fit well and offer suitable support?

Confidence: It is natural for someone to feel worried about falling especially if they have previously fallen or have difficulty with balance. While many falls do not result in significant injuries such as fractures, they can decrease a person's confidence and lead to a reduction in their usual daily activity. Offering support and looking at all the environmental factors to reduce risk will improve confidence and lead to increased mobility and wellbeing.

Equipment: Ensuring that residents are using the correct walking aids will improve confidence and reduce risk. Are they using their own walking aid? Do not share walking aids. Walking sticks and Zimmer frames are measured for each resident to ensure they are the correct height for that resident. If they are shared, they may INCREASE the risk of a fall.....

Are the ferrules (the rubber tips) on the walking sticks and Zimmer frames worn? If they are they may cause the stick or frame to slip, causing a fall. These are easily replaced and should be checked by staff before use.

Residents using wheelchairs to access the outdoors should have the lap-belt secured whilst moving. Are the tyres pumped up? Is the wheelchair in good working order? Where the wheelchair is resident specific – do not share

Lighting/signage:

Ensure there is adequate lighting both indoors and outdoors. Consider a resident getting up at night to use the bathroom, can they see well enough to get to the bathroom? Would a night light/lamp help to reduce the risk of them falling?

Hazards and Obstructions:

Staff must take care whilst performing their duties, for example, medication trolleys and housekeeping trolleys should not be left obstructing the corridor, creating a hazard. Staff opening doors must be aware of residents nearby who may be startled or struck by opening doors.



Are signs clear and easy to read? Are paths and walkways clearly defined?



Fire doors:

should be opened after fire alarm tests, they are heavy doors and residents may lose balance trying to open them themselves. Be mindful during fire alarm tests that residents may not understand it is a test and try to get up and escape the building.....

Wet floors/spillages:

Wet floors must have a wet floor sign displayed. These must be removed as soon as the floor is dry as the sign itself could present a trip hazard. Any spillages must be reported straight away, appropriate signage should be put in place and they must be cleaned up immediately.

Relatives/Visitors:

Family members and visitors may want to take residents out of the home. This may be simply out into the garden or out into the local community (garden centres/parks/shops etc).



- ◆ Are they aware of a falls risk?
- ◆ Does the visitor know how to open and close the wheelchair?
- ◆ Are they aware that a lap belt and footplates are used at all times whilst the wheelchair is in motion and the lap belt released and the brakes applied once stationary?
- ◆ Are they aware of the need for a walking aid and how to support the resident when they are walking?
- ◆ Can they get the resident in and out of a car/vehicle safely?
- ◆ Will there be steps where they are going? Can the resident manage these? Even if there are slopes these may present a hazard.
- ◆ If the resident is visiting someone's home, are they aware of trip hazards – rugs, furniture, trailing leads or pets.